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Molly White

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MOLLY WHITE.

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MOLLY WHITE:

OR THE

BRIDE BEWITCHED.

A TALE.

By D. KELLY Esq.

LONDON.

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MOLLY WHITE,

OR THE

BRIDE BEWITCHED.

WHEN Edward* reign'd, that chief of high renown,
In Kent there liv'd a rich good natur'd clown,
Who taught his friends to praiſe his Chriſtmaſs beer,
And made his landlord merry twice a year,
Still ply'd his gueſts with coarſe, but harmleſs jokes,
And was much lik'd by all the gentle folks.
An only child (death ſwept away the reſt)
A beauteous daughter all his care confeſt:

* Edward the Third.

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For love her lips and coal-black eyes were made;
Her ſilver treſſes on her ſhoulders ſtray'd;
Good-humour ſtill ſat ſmiling on her face;
She ſung with ſweetneſs as ſhe danc'd with grace;
And when ſhe ſpoke none thought ſhe ſpoke too long,
Her ſpeech was ſcarce leſs charming than her ſong.
In cotton dreſs'd each holy-day ſhe ſhone;
At church all eyes were fix'd on her alone;
Where'er ſhe went her company was ſought,
Rich fairings too from all the fairs ſhe brought;
Such precious gifts no other maid cou'd boaſt,
For Molly White was ev'ry ſhepherd's toaſt.

Now ſixteen winters had run o'er her head,
And nature told her 'twas full time to wed:
No fond admirer durſt her lips profane,
But her fair hand was ſqueez'd by ev'ry ſwain;
Love's milder joys thus gently warm'd her breaſt,
And morning viſions hinted all the reſt.
Such dreams as griev'd or gave her heart delight
To her dear Bridget* ſhe reveal'd at night:

* The ſervant maid.

Diſcourſing ſtill, as in one bed they lay,
Sleep ne'er approach'd them 'till the dawn of day:
The ſelf ſame thing a thouſand ways they ſaid,
For maids are wondrous eloquent in bed.
Sometimes they faſten'd on a rival's name,
But wedlock always was their fav'rite theme:
Each lover's merits were with judgment weigh'd;
This man was rich, but clumſy, and ill made;
That, richer ſtill, with grizly hair was crown'd;
And one had youth that was not worth a pound.

Some happy months in theſe amuſements paſt,
This virgin fix'd her wavering heart at laſt:
Fix'd for a day! the learn'd can ne'er agree,
Yet ſure the ſtars know ſomething more than we;
While eager maids ſome ſhort-liv'd choice purſue,
Fate ſtalks behind and laughs at all they do.

'Twas now the ſeaſon when th' induſtrious ſwain
His corn and hay ſecures from wind and rain;
When flocks of geeſe in new-ſhorn fields are fed,
And ev'ry beggar gives God thanks for bread:

A marriage feaſt made all the village gay;
There ſhone the neighbours in their beſt array.
Our worthy clown, his wife and daughter fair,
The 'ſquire himſelf and his kind ſpouſe were there:
A ſmoaking bowl diffus'd its joys around,
The fiddle ſqueak'd, the dancers ſhook the ground.
A flaunting taylor, lately come from town,
Whoſe nimble heels had fought and gain'd renown,
His chioceſt capers on the floor diſplay'd;
And who cou'd match him but our lovely maid?
With equal time they wheel'd, they ſunk, they roſe,
Their locks behind kept meaſure with their toes:
A comely pair! this ev'ry tongue confeſt,
The good old prieſt was raviſh'd like the reſt:
But honeſt Tom* cou'd not conceal his joy,
With eager arms he claſp'd the London boy.
The dances ended a ſoft air they ſung,
Again the cottage with applauſes rung;
He view'd his partner with a lover's eyes,
His beauteous partner made as kind replies:
The ſimple maid cou'd ſcarce conceal her ſmart,
For Dick was now the Foreman of her heart.

* The father of Moll White.

Along the board a ſecret whiſper ran,
All ſaid the taylor was a ſweet young man;
So ſpruce a lad with ſuch a noble trade
Deſerv'd a wife --- in ſhort the match was made.
The beer was brew'd, the wedding gown was bought,
A ring provided, and a licence ſought.
All things were ready for the nuptial day:
Molly was chearful as the month of May:
The bridegroom ſtill ſat gazing by her ſide,
And ev'ry moment ſome new charm diſcry'd:
No hen was e'er more careful of her young;
Upon her hand, upon her lips he hung;
With ev'ry kiſs he did his vows renew,
As oft ſhe ſwore to be for ever true,
But fate, relentleſs fate, had ſomething elſe in view.

Juſt at this time the 'ſquire's old huntſman dy'd,
The pious neighbours flock'd from ev'ry ſide;
Some ſtrangers too from diſtant places came,
For honeſt Ringwood was well known to fame.
A wake ſo crowded ne'er was ſeen before:
Their ſunday coats the ſmirking peaſants wore,

And ev'ry maid (as we may well ſuppoſe)
For ſuch a place her beſt apparel choſe.
Such was the noiſe as when at ev'ning hours
Rooks ſcream and clatter round their duſky bowr's.
A ſhepherd ſwain, tall, beautiful and ſtrong,
Huſh'd the rude clamour with a fav'rite ſong;
In all the ſports he held the foremoſt place,
And told a ſtory with a wondrous grace.
Our am'rous maid ſurvey'd him o'er and o'er
And felt a flame ſhe never felt before:
A ſudden weight about her heart ſhe found,
Her zone was looſen'd and her breaſt unbound:
The comely ſwain to her aſſiſtance flew;
She ſqueez'd his hand and with a ſigh withdrew.
Three days together, to her room confin'd,
She nurs'd the pleaſing fever of her mind.
Strange revolution! Dick cou'd charm no more:
Kate* ſtorm'd, her aunt advis'd, her father ſwore:
The prieſt himſelf exerted all his pow'r:
"Ah! what a ſin to let the beer grow ſour!

* The mother of Moll White.

"And

" And why ſhould children give their parents pain?"
Theſe weighty arguments he urg'd in vain:
Good council may ſome appetites remove,
But preaching ne'er can quench the flame of love.
Moll ſcarce cou'd reſt, ſuch thoughts diſturb'd her head;
She wiſh'd for death or ſomething in its ſtead:
Silent and ſad the joyleſs days ſhe paſt,
And ev'ry night ſeem'd longer than the laſt:
Bridget no more her penſive ſoul cou'd chear;
Muſick itſelf was poiſon to her ear:
To fortune-tellers ſhe diſclos'd her pain,
And ev'ry remedy was try'd in vain.
At length (ſure heav'n Her ſecret wiſhes heard)
Roger, the ſwain belov'd, at church appear'd;
All eyes with wonder the fair youth ſurvey'd,
While his were fix'd on our enchanting maid:
Like her's, his boſom felt a tender flame,
And honeſt wedlock was his only aim.
Firſt to the prieſt he whiſper'd his deſign,
And brib'd his rev'rence with a full-fed ſwine:
A prudent ſtep (this ev'ry one may gueſs)
All his propoſals met with due ſucceſs.

Moll

Moll was o'erjoyed, the willing parties din'd:
With mutual pleaſure was the contract ſign'd;
The future marriage was at church proclaim'd,
The day was fix'd, and all the gueſts were nam'd:
Three weathers bled, a fatted calf was ſlain,
And lambs and kids for mercy cry'd in vain.
Meantime th' unhappy taylor loſt his reſt,
Love, ſhame and rage at once his mind poſſeſt:
Wild with deſpair from houſe to houſe he ſtray'd,
Accus'd his ſtars, and curs'd the faithleſs maid.
Revenge he vow'd on his ſucceſsful foe,
But ſtill he knew not how to give the blow;
With arms alone it was in vain to ſtrive,
For the young ſhepherd fear'd no man alive.
Reſolv'd at length ſome other means to try,
(For now, alas! the wedding day drew nigh)
The mighty ruler of a ſchool he ſought,
Much fam'd for cunning, and with learning fraught:
Like Merlin ſkill'd in ev'ry ſecret art,
He had the book of knowledge all by heart:
Young lovers dreams with eaſe he cou'd expound;
Loſt maiden-heads and ſtolen hearts he found:

The

The uſe of philtres no man knew ſo well;
His breath alone cou'd break a magick ſpell;
To joyleſs huſbands he cou'd peace reſtore,
And make fond wives of thoſe that rail'd before.
His deſp'rate caſe the weeping lover told,
And ſeconded his ſad complaint with gold:
Money, like muſick, ſoftens ev'ry heart;
The ſcholar promis'd to employ his art.
A coat he borrow'd from a neighb'ring ſwain,
(A ſcarlet coat that ſerv'd in Harold's reign)
A greaſy night-cap well japan'd with ſmoak,
A beggar's wallet and a beggar's cloak:
Next with ſome juice his face and hands he ſmears,
And ſhades his chin with artificial hairs;
With crutches then his drooping frame ſuſtains,
And groans and trembles with diſſembled pains.
The wizard thus in borrow'd feathers bold,
(Not more Ulyſſes was diſguis'd of old)
To Tom's gay cottage bent his ſteps, and found
Our blooming bride with knots and garlands crown'd:
The doors, the walls with fragrant boughs were dreſt,
And buſy Kate prepar'd the nuptial feaſt.

Heav'n guard, he cry'd, thyſelf, thy ſpouſe and daughter
From rabid dogs, from plagues, from fire and water.
Moll ſtar'd! what art thou, honeſt man, ſays Kate?
One, he reply'd, that reads the book of fate.
In hell from ten to fifteen years of age,
I ſerv'd a Chriſtian monarch as a page;
Thence ſnatch'd to heav'n I dwelt in Capricorn,
Under whoſe ſign moſt marry'd men are born:
There firſt with angels I convers'd, and there
I heard the muſick of each heav'nly ſphere.
Whole days I baſk'd in Venus' ſultry ray;
Whole nights I wander'd o'er the milky way;
Three joyous ſummers in the moon I paſt,
And ſaw the ſky that ne'er was overcaſt,
The groves of gold ſtill breathing am'rous flames,
The ſilver mountains, and the lake of dreams,
Whence glitt'ring ſwarms of female ſouls ariſe,
Some ſhap'd like bees, and ſome like butterflies.
From thence to earth, my native place, I came:
On earth I wedded a young fairy dame.
Such are our joys as mortals ne'er can taſte:
Sometimes we ramble on the wat'ry waſte;

Sometimes

Sometimes in air our ſilken wings we try,
And drink the nectar of a purer ſky.
While winter reigns we revel under ground;
But when with corn the fragrant fields are crown'd,
O'er hills and dales, a ſportive train, we rove
And ride the winds that whiſtle thro' the grove.
Our active chiefs make all mankind their care:
Some in the mines the glitt'ring ore prepare;
Some rule in war; ſome teach the waves to roll,
And guide the fleets that ſeek the ſouthern pole.
Mine is the taſk (for ſo the fates decreed)
In fertile fields to nurſe the ſwelling ſeed;
To check the froſt that vernal greens deforms;
To calm the rage of rude autumnal ſtorms;
From dogs to guard the tender lambs, and ſave
The roving heifers from a wat'ry grave;
From ſleeping babes to chaſe the midnight foe,
And teach their teeth without a tear to grow;
For longing maids fit huſbands to provide,
To chear the bridegroom and to charm the bride.
A faithful glaſs, whoſe counſels I purſue,
Brings all the paſt and preſent to my view:

Taught

Taught by this mirror, that reflects the mind,
I see the secret views of all mankind.
In hell itself a judge's place I claim;
My voice alone the jarring fiends can tame;
I make the Devil from his cavern rise,
And dance a rigadoon before my eyes.
Bless me! says Moll, don't raise your devils here:
Fair nymph! quoth he, thou hast no cause to fear;
Of all the maids that earth's wide bounds contain
Thou art the dearest to th' aërial train:
Thrice did our gentle Queen thy name repeat,
And thrice she wept at thy impending fate.
How blind is love! Ah Moll be warn'd by me:
Men are not always what they seem to be.
Roger has strength a stubborn oak to cut;
Roger is young, sedate, good-natur'd, but---
Wedlock's a dang'rous thing---alas! I fear---
He said, and whisper'd something in her ear.
A sudden paleness all her face o'erflows,
Trembling and tott'ring to her bed she goes,
And sinks supine; Kate shouting claps her hands;
In deep amaze the faithful Bridget stands.

Whole

Whole ſhow'rs of water in her face they threw;
A mournful ſigh the beauteous patient drew:
" To me, ſhe cry'd, ſure fortune is unkind,
" My hopes are vaniſh'd like a blaſt of wind.
" O'erwhelm'd with ſhame, ah, whither ſhall I fly?
" Was e'er a creature ſo deceiv'd as I?
" Whom can I blame? the choice was all my own:
" Alas! I fix'd upon a worthleſs drone.
" Roger has ev'ry fault that maids deteſt,
" A ſtinking breath is worſe than all the reſt;
" His face is ſtill disfigur'd with a frown:
" Wretch that I was to think of ſuch a clown!
" An aukward lubbard; an ill-manner'd beaſt;
" The little tradeſman is genteel at leaſt:
" Him ſhall I wed; or ſtill a maid remain;
" But ſure no man ſhall make me weep again."
Tears choak'd her voice, "My child is loſt," ſays Kate,
" That rogue bewitch'd her with his book of fate."
The diſmal news o'er all the village ſpread,
Nay, ſome reported that Moll White was dead.
To comfort Kate her neighb'ring goſſips came,
All ſoftly whiſper'd 'twas a burning ſhame.

A council ſat on our lamenting bride;
The pow'r of witchcraft was ſeverely try'd;
The beggar's figure was deſcrib'd at large:
To him alone the wicked fact they charge;
A fairy prince in human ſhape, no doubt,
How hard to keep ſuch keen intruders out!
Thro' key-holes, chimneys, ev'ry chink they creep,
And tempt young virgins while they're faſt aſleep;
If once enflam'd with love, enjoy they muſt,
For nothing leſs can ſatisfy their luſt:
Of this ſome late examples they unfold:
Ah me! what ſad what wond'rous tales were told!
A good old wife, more ſkilful than the reſt,
The bridal room with holy water bleſt;
St. John's wort, Speedwell, (herbs that can ſecure
The fraileſt virgin from a ſpright impure)
In copious handfuls on the floor were ſpread;
Some reliques too were faſten'd to the bed;
Black-hafted knives were ſtuck on either ſide,
And ev'ry corner was well fortify'd.

The ſun was now declining to the weſt,
The time appointed for the nuptial feaſt.

Tom, with the prieſt (a welcome gueſt) appear'd,
And found too true what he before had heard:
Was e'er a father plagu'd with ſuch a evil?
Ten times he gave his daughter to the devil.
The worthy Prieſt, who long'd, perhaps, to dine,
Diſplay'd his learning like a true divine:
In vain he thunder'd out from holy writ;
Not e'en St. Paul cou'd make the bride ſubmit:
To threats and tears ſhe anſwer'd with diſdain,
Firm as a rock that braves the wind and rain.
And now the bridegroom with his brother came;
Neat was their dreſs, their ſize and ſhape the ſame;
His ſpouſe's room he ſeeks without delay,
She ſees, ſhe ſcreams, ſhe falls and ſwoons away.
Was e'er a lover ſtruck with ſuch ſurprize?
The crouded chamber rung with female cries.
Poor Roger, trembling for the ſpeechleſs maid,
Thrice to embrace her, but in vain, eſſay'd;
Repuls'd with ſcorn in ſilent grief he view'd,
Till tears at length his manly cheek bedew'd.
What leſs than witchcraft cou'd have ſteel'd her breaſt?
This Tom, and this the Prieſt himſelf confeſt.

While

While thus around the mournful fair they ſtand,
Dick boldly enter'd with a num'rous band
Of nimble taylors, all well arm'd with oak,
Ruſh'd thro' the crowd and thus undaunted ſpoke:
I come, good people, with no bad deſign---
My right I claim---by right this girl is mine---
Let none oppoſe---who does he ſhall repent---
Moll ſtretch'd her hand in token of conſent,
But ſtretch'd in vain; for, with a dreadful frown,
Kate clinch'd her fiſt and knock'd the champion down.
Death! hell! and wounds! on cudgels cudgels riſe,
A ſwarm of ruſticks to the clamour flies,
The ſtruggling prieſt is toſt amidſt the crowd,
Chairs crack, cheſts rattle, women roar aloud.
Roger with fury ruſhes on the foe,
And fells three taylors with one thund'ring blow;
Cruſh'd by his arm in heaps they bite the floor;
When lo! the 'Squire alights before the door;
His ample preſence ſtrikes the crowd with awe,
The vanquiſh'd taylors from the fight withdraw.
To bluſtring war ſucceeds the calm of peace:
Tom hails his maſter with a chearful face.

A copious dinner on the board appears,
A flood of wine the converſation chears:
So much their joy with ev'ry bowl encreas'd,
That one wou'd think it was a nuptial feaſt.
To ſongs at length their wild good-humour ran;
Young Roger warbled like a dying ſwan;
His melting voice a marble breaſt cou'd move,
For ev'ry choice is render'd ſweet by love.
The bride alone was deaf to all he ſung,
Still in her ear the fatal whiſper rung.
Curs'd be the lips that caus'd her heart to grieve!
May ſuch vile traytors feel the pains they give!
Ye Schoolmaſters! what malice moves your mind
With wicked lies to vex the female kind?
Vent all your ſpleen on wild unruly boys,
But ſcare no maid from matrimonial joys:
Sure 'tis a ſin---ah make the caſe your own,
And learn to pitty thoſe that lye alone.

Now half the night in pleaſing mirth was ſpent,
The 'Squire and prieſt were full and home they went.

To Bridget Kate her beauteous charge conſign'd:
(Ah! think what anguiſh roſe in Roger's mind)
About her neck her own dear beads ſhe hung,
And ſome oration againſt witchcraft ſung;
Again the room was ſprinkled o'er with care,
The boldeſt fairy dare not enter there.

And now to reſt the ſtranger youths retire,
Tom reels to bed, and Kate puts out the fire;
Deep ſilence follows; not a breath remains,
Nought but the cock's ſhrill, melancholy ſtrains:
The light was baniſh'd but what dimly ſhone
Thro' the pale windows from the Moon alone:
O'er all the houſe ſoft, drouzy vapours creep,
But Roger ſlept not in the midſt of ſleep;
In wiſhful thought the bride he ſtill ſurvey'd,
For love grows fiercer in the midnight ſhade.
He roſe, and cautious caſt his eyes around,
Apply'd his ear to ev'ry fancy'd ſound;
With ghoſt-like pace crept ſoft along the floor,
And trembling ſtood by Molly's chamber-door.
The latch remov'd her bed appear'd in view;
His heart beat thicker as he nearer drew;

On her bare breaſt his glowing hand he lay'd,
And ſilent ſtretch'd beſide the ſleeping maid:
But when he rouz'd her with a gentle ſhake,
She hiſs'd and rattle'd like a ſtarted ſnake;
Repell'd his arms, and, bouncing from the bed,
To the next chamber like a fury fled.
But wond'ring much that Bridget ſtay'd behind,
(Bridget, indeed was of the gentleſt kind)
Soft ſhe return'd, and, panting, lay'd her breaſt
(As maids are curious) 'gainſt a neighb'ring cheſt,
To the bed ſide inclin'd her greedy ear,
And thus ſtood liſt'ning to the whiſpering pair.
Not long, when cheſt and bed began to ring---
O ne'er was heard ſo terrible a thing.
Whether thro' fear I can't pretend to tell,
Moll's breath grew ſhort: ſhe ſcream'd and down ſhe fell.
Wak'd by the cry Kate call'd for light, and found
Her daughter pale and breathleſs on the ground:
She beat her breaſt and ſhriek'd, not louder ſcreams
The widow'd wretch that ſees her houſe in flames.
Bridget---for want of breath---cou'd hardly tell
How ſhe was frighten'd by the fiends of hell:

Some buſy devil was in the bed ſhe ſwore,
And ſure no creature ever ſuffer'd more.
Now Moll awaken'd from her diſmal trance,
Firſt on the bed beſtow'd a wiſhful glance;
Then whither, whither is my Roger flown?
Mammy! my Roger is no worthleſs drone!
Ah! who wou'd believe a fairy-monger's tale?
With me ſuch lies ſhall never more prevail.
She ſaid, and dropp'd a tear (ſure ſign of grace)
Her mother lock'd her in her long embrace.
Bridget herſelf through pure good-nature wept.
Again the fire was rouz'd, the floor was ſwept.
The bride with all her ornaments was dreſt:
Good Lord! how Roger hugg'd her to his breaſt!
The Prieſt was ſent for with the riſing ſun,
Their hands were join'd---and ev'ry thing was done.
Tom gladly feaſted all the neighb'ring boors,
And our dear Bridget was kick'd out of doors.

FINIS.

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